

Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office

2015

March Report

**Annual Report of the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office
For the Period of January 1-December 31, 2014**

Prepared by P. Douglas Kelley, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner

March 31, 2015



**134 Western Avenue
Fond du Lac, WI 54935**

Phone number: 920-929-3366

Fax number: 920-929-6818

Our Mission

The duty of the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office (FDL MEO) is to determine the cause and manner of death for all deaths that fall under its jurisdiction (as outlined in Wisconsin State Statute 979.01). The staff of the Medical Examiner's Office utilizes its knowledge and experience in the field of death investigation and forensic pathology in the performance of comprehensive, professional investigations, which clarify the circumstances surrounding these deaths. Through the identification, documentation and accurate interpretation of important forensic scientific information, the Medical Examiner's Office may provide information useful in criminal and civil proceedings. This information may also serve to protect the health and safety of the public by identifying contagious diseases; by identifying environmental hazards in the workplace, home, and community; and, by tracking local mortality trends (trends in suicides, motor vehicle fatalities, drug and alcohol related deaths, homicides, etc.). As part of their investigation, they may collect evidence, obtain laboratory specimens, and make positive identification of decedents. Through their work, it is the ultimate goal of the Medical Examiner's Office to contribute to the protection and education of the community to make Fond du Lac County a safer, healthier place to live.

The Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office is also committed to providing service to other Wisconsin county Coroner and Medical Examiner offices, through the performance of forensic autopsies, assistance with forensic training and education, and consultation on medicolegal issues. It is a goal of the office to be a leading force in the standardization, professionalization and improvement of death investigation in the state of Wisconsin.

2014 Staff Listing

Doug Kelley, M.D., Chief Medical Examiner
 Kristinza W. Giese, MD, Associate Medical Examiner
 Amy DeMeter, Chief Investigator/Forensic Autopsy Assistant
 Tom O'Connor, Autopsy Supervisor/Forensic Autopsy Assistant
 Mike Zankle, Investigator/Forensic Autopsy Assistant
 David Lefeber, Investigator/Forensic Autopsy Assistant
 Fred Stansbury, Investigator
 Vicki Hoch, Investigator
 Katelyn Lindsley, Investigator
 Sue Voigt, Administrative Assistant
 Dean Schelinske, Autopsy Assistant

Both forensic pathologists employed by the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office are board certified by the American Board of Pathology (ABP) in anatomic, clinical and forensic pathology. Being board certified by the ABP means that a pathologist has completed training in anatomic, clinical and forensic pathology, and has passed the board examinations given by the ABP to ensure competence in this field.

All death investigators employed by the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office are required to be certified by the American Board of Medico-legal Death Investigation

(ABMDI) within 18 months of employment. Being ABMDI-certified indicates that an investigator has been formally trained in death investigation, has met the standards of the ABMDI and has successfully passed the ABMDI certification examination. The ABMDI is recognized and supported by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME).

2014 Overview

2014 represents the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office's (FDL MEO) ninth successful year as an independent Medical Examiner's Office and referral autopsy service. The office operated as a satellite of the Milwaukee County Medical Examiner's Office from 1999 through 2005, and as a Coroner's Office before that.

In August of 2014, Amy DeMeter joined the staff of the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office as Chief Investigator. Investigator DeMeter came to the office from Door County, where she had served as a Deputy Medical Examiner since 2010. Investigator DeMeter is currently working towards her death investigation certification by the American Board of Medico-legal Death Investigation (ABMDI). In September of 2014, Dean Schelinske joined the staff as an on-call autopsy assistant.

The entire staff of the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office are members of the Wisconsin Coroner's and Medical Examiner's Association (WCMEA). Chief Investigator Amy DeMeter has been the Association's Sergeant-at-Arms for the past 2 years. Dr. Kelley has served the Association as President and First Vice President in the past. Amy DeMeter attended the Fall WCMEA Conference and Tom O'Connor attended both the Spring and Fall training conferences held by the WCMEA. Since his attendance was not budgeted for 2014, however, Mr. O'Connor opted to attend at his own expense. Investigators Mike Zankle, Dave Lefebvre and Katelyn Lindsley all attended the Milwaukee County MEO's annual training conference in November of 2014.

Both Dr. Kelley and Dr. Giese are members of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) and the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS). Dr. Kelley attended the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences held in Seattle in February of 2014 and Dr. Giese attended the Annual Meeting of the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) held in Portland in October 2014.

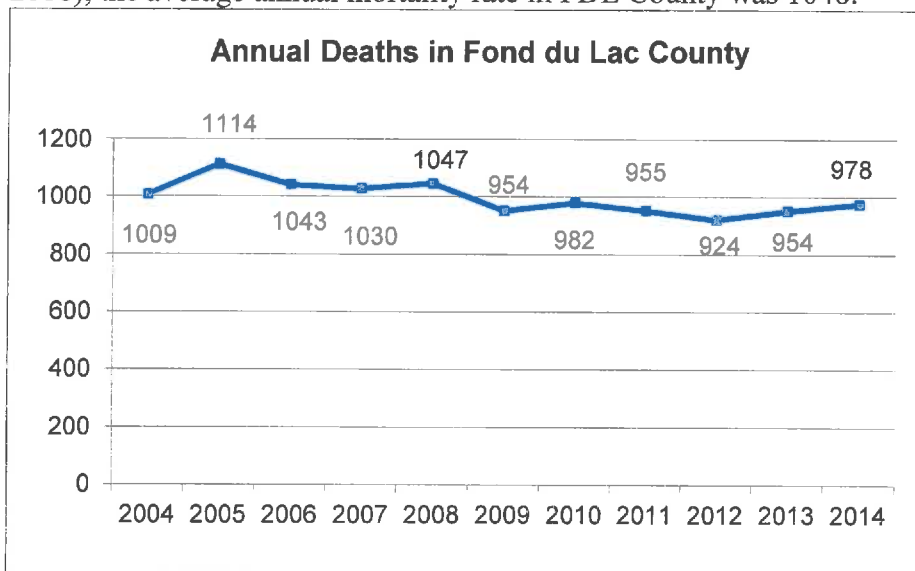
The office remains an active member of the Pediatric Death Review Committee for Fond du Lac County. This committee reviews pediatric deaths in Fond du Lac County and addresses issues of safety and injury prevention for our younger citizens. Dr. Kelley serves as Vice Chair of the Wisconsin State Child Death Review Council, giving Fond du Lac County additional representation on issues of pediatric death investigation in Wisconsin.

Starting in 2014, the office began converting all paper files to digital format by scanning documents into a permanent digital archive. Because of the vastly different investigative and record keeping policies throughout the decades, the task has posed a significant challenge for the office staff. Once completed, however, the case files of the FDL MEO (and the FDL Coroner's Office preceding it) will be preserved indefinitely in a more

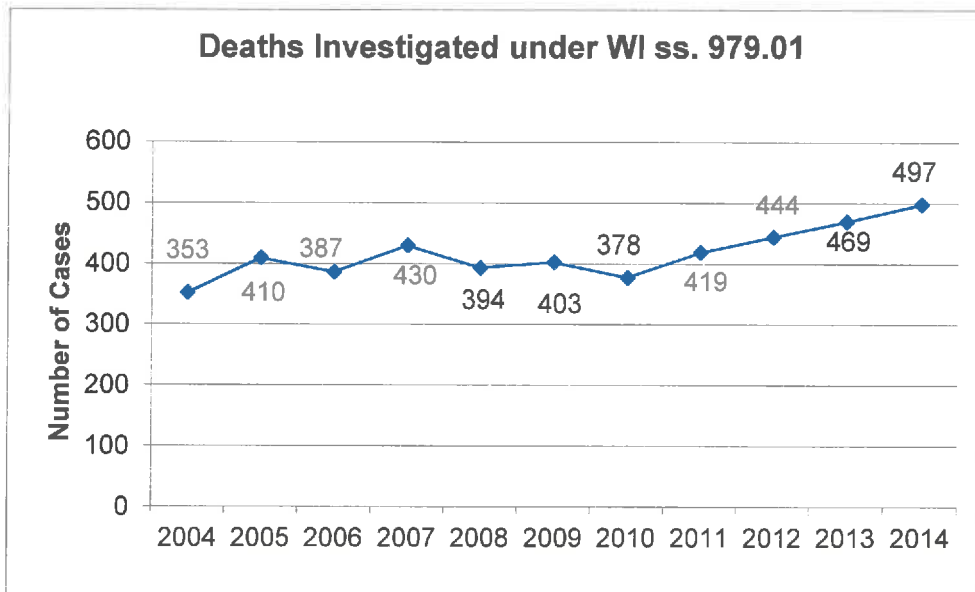
organized, secure format. Information from past cases will be easier to access, immune from deterioration, and safe from fire, flood and misfiling. To expedite the process, FDL County committed additional funds for the project allowing it to be completed by the Spring of 2015.

2014 Case Statistics

There were 978 deaths in Fond du Lac County in 2014. This rate comprises slightly less than 1% of the county population (county population: 101,984). This mortality rate is not dissimilar from that found in other communities, both metropolitan and rural. The mortality rate for FDL County appears to have remained relatively level for the past 6 years (see chart below), averaging 958 deaths per year. In the 5 years prior to that (2004-2008), the average annual mortality rate in FDL County was 1048.



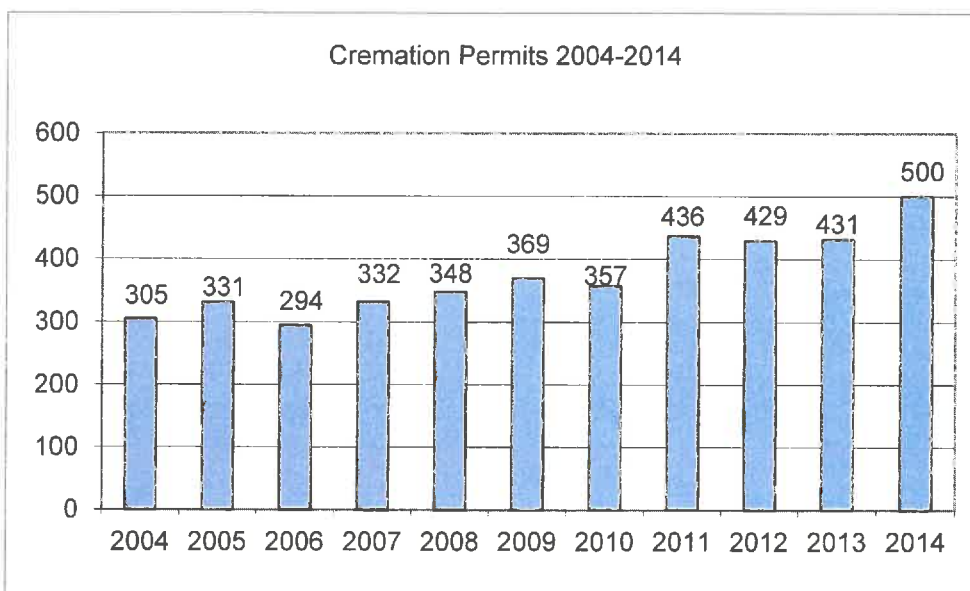
In 2014, the FDL County Medical Examiner's Office investigated 497 cases—28 more than in 2013 and the highest number of annual cases investigated in office history. Over the past 5 years there has been an upward trend in the number of deaths requiring an ME investigation in FDL County (see chart below).



Of the 497 cases investigated by the FDL MEO, jurisdiction was assumed in 142 (29%) of them (based on the criteria outlined in Wisconsin state statute 979.01). In assuming jurisdiction, the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office performs a complete investigation, determines the cause and manner of death and signs a death certificate.

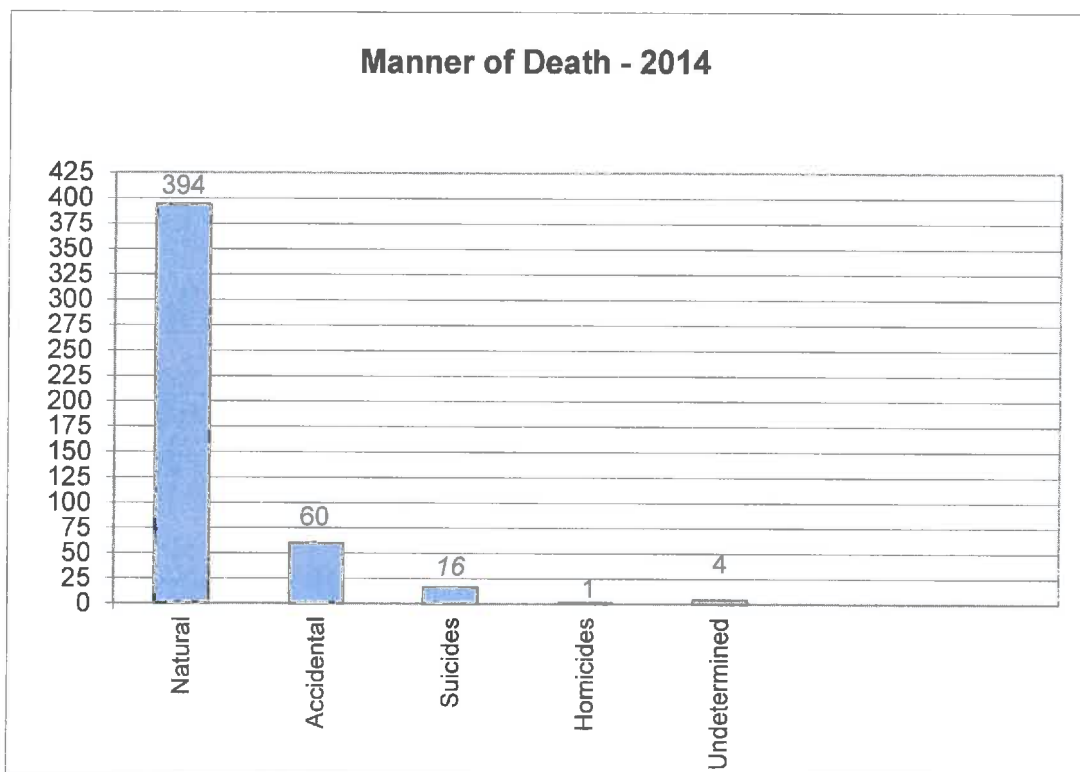
Cremations and Disinterments

A total of 500 cremation permits were issued in 2014. This represents the highest annual number of cremation permits issued by the office in its history. While cremations have been trending upwards over the past 9 years (see chart below), these numbers are not necessarily dependent on population or death statistics, but on the unpredictable, individual preferences of the decedents and/or their next of kin.



Two disinterment permits were issued in 2014.

Manners of Death in FDL County, 2014



Of the 497 death investigations performed in 2014, 9 cases were found to fall under the jurisdiction of another county Coroner/Medical Examiner's office; therefore, the FDL MEO referred jurisdiction to those agencies. Since the certification of manner of death for these cases was the responsibility of another county, the manners of death for these cases are not included in the Fond du Lac County statistics. Of the cases investigated by the office, and receiving a manner of death ruling in Fond du Lac County, 394 were natural deaths (81%). This percentage is consistent with the average percentage of natural deaths in FDL County over the previous ten-year period (84%). Based on the 2014 statistics, 91.7% of the total deaths in Fond du Lac County were natural deaths.

Accidents: There was an increase in accidental deaths in Fond du Lac County in 2014, with a total of 60 accidental deaths certified, compared to 51 deaths in 2013. There were 65 and 51 accidental deaths in 2012 and 2011, respectively. Of the 2014 accidental deaths, 8 were due to motor vehicle crashes (cars and/or trucks), 1 less than in 2013. There was an increase in motorcycle fatalities in 2014, however, with 3 deaths certified (compared to 1 death in 2013). There were no pedestrian-motor vehicle fatalities, drowning deaths or fire-related deaths in 2014. Since 2010, there have been no fire-related deaths in FDL County. There have been no aircraft, ATV, or boat-related fatalities in the last 3 years.

Motor Vehicular-related Fatalities: One of the 8 motor vehicle crash deaths investigated in 2014 was a delayed death resulting from complications of an injury incurred in a pickup truck vs. tree collision in 1977. The 7 remaining car/truck crash fatalities resulted

from 6 separate 2014 crashes, and included 6 drivers and 1 passenger. Three of the 7 crash victims died in collisions with another vehicle, while the remaining 4 fatalities occurred in 3 separate vehicle rollover crashes. Seatbelts were known to be worn by only 2 of the 7 victims (seat belt use by one victim could not be ascertained, however). All of the unbelted drivers in the rollover crashes were ejected from their vehicles and died of their injuries. One of the victims survived briefly in the hospital before succumbing to his injuries. Of the 6 drivers, toxicology was negative in 5. The 6th driver was under the influence of opiates. None of the victims had detectable alcohol in their blood at the time of the crash. The impairment status of the drivers of the other vehicles in the 3 multi-vehicle crashes is unknown. Inattentive driving appears to have played a role in 5 of the 6 crashes, with excessive speed a potential factor in 3 of the crashes.

The 3 motorcycle deaths in 2014 included a collision with a deer, a rear-end collision from a car, and a collision with a telephone pole after leaving the roadway. Alcohol was not a factor in 2 of these crashes, and the third fatality had a blood alcohol level below the WI legal limit at the time of the crash. The single snowmobile fatality investigated in 2014 involved a collision with a tree by an intoxicated driver.

Toxicity Deaths: The number of accidental deaths due to “drug toxicity” in 2014 was 9, the same number as in 2013. There were 11 deaths in 2012 and 6 deaths in 2011. Of the 9 deaths in 2014, 6 were certified as “mixed drug toxicity” or “multidrug toxicity”. Ethanol (alcohol) was a component of 2 of the multidrug toxicity cases, and 4 cases involved prescribed medications.

Two toxicity deaths involved the use of heroin with 4 additional deaths involving other opiates. Abuse of heroin and prescription medications continues to pose a significant problem for FDL County and its surrounding counties. With regard to stimulant abuse, cocaine metabolites were detected in 2 deaths, including one death from methamphetamine use. It is notable that all of these multidrug toxicity victims had a prior history of substance abuse/misuse due to illicit drugs and/or prescription medications. The toxicity cases above do not include a 10th accidental toxicity death from carbon monoxide exposure.

The remaining accidental deaths in 2014 include 32 complications of injuries related to falls, predominantly hip fractures in elderly people and head trauma. There was one choking death investigated in 2014, in addition to one case of mechanical asphyxia and one case of death due to hypothermia. There was also one delayed death reported, resulting from complications of a neck injury sustained in 1995.

Suicides: The number of FDL County suicidal deaths in 2014 was 16, an increase from 2013 (12 deaths). All of the decedents were Fond du Lac County residents. The causes of death in these cases include gunshot wounds (11 cases), asphyxia due to hanging (2 cases), carbon monoxide toxicity (one case), asphyxia due to suffocation (one case), and mixed drug toxicity (one case). Thirteen of the decedents were male and 10 of the deaths took place within the decedent’s residence. Twelve of the decedents had a history of treatment for depression and/or other mental health diagnoses.

Homicides: There was one homicide in Fond du Lac County in 2014. The cause of death was a gunshot wound to the head. The number of annual homicides has remained ≤ 2 for over 15 years.

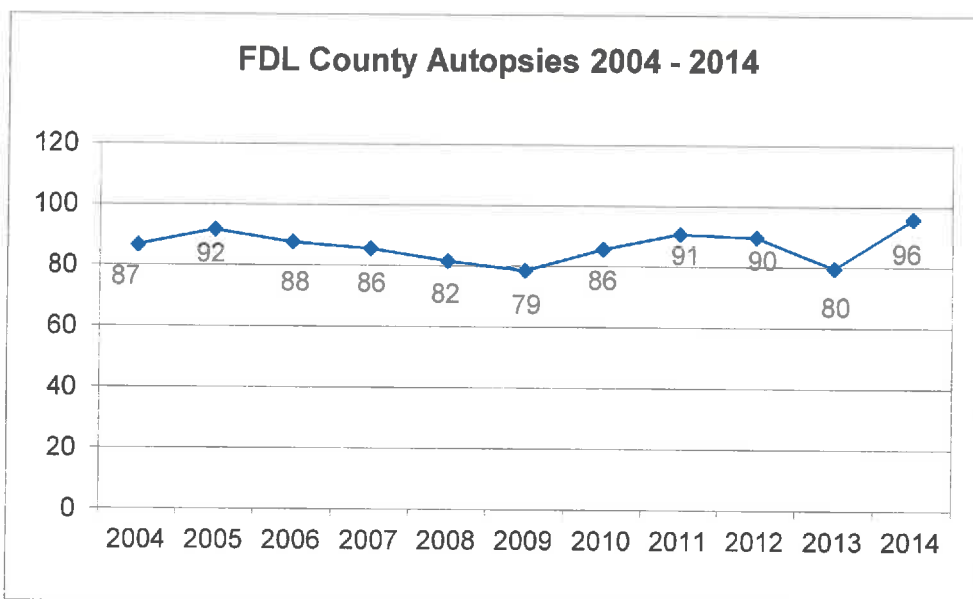
Four “undetermined” manner of death rulings were made in 2014.

Manner of Death by Month 2014

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D
Natural	40	36	37	27	38	32	37	21	22	38	26	40
Accidental	7	5	2	4	5	3	5	7	6	7	3	6
Suicide	1	1	1	0	1	2	1	0	2	1	4	2
Homicide	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Und.	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0

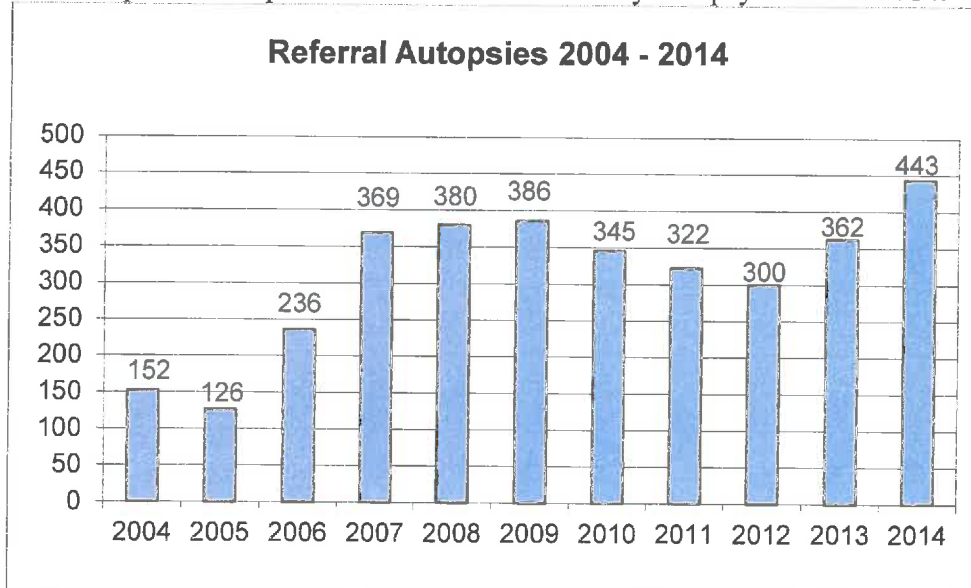
In 2014, the highest number of accidental deaths investigated (7) occurred in January, August and October, with 6 accidental deaths occurring in September and December, and 5 deaths in February, May and July. With regard to suicides, the highest number occurred in November (4) with 2 deaths occurring in each of the months of June, September and December. No suicides occurred in April or August.

Autopsy Service

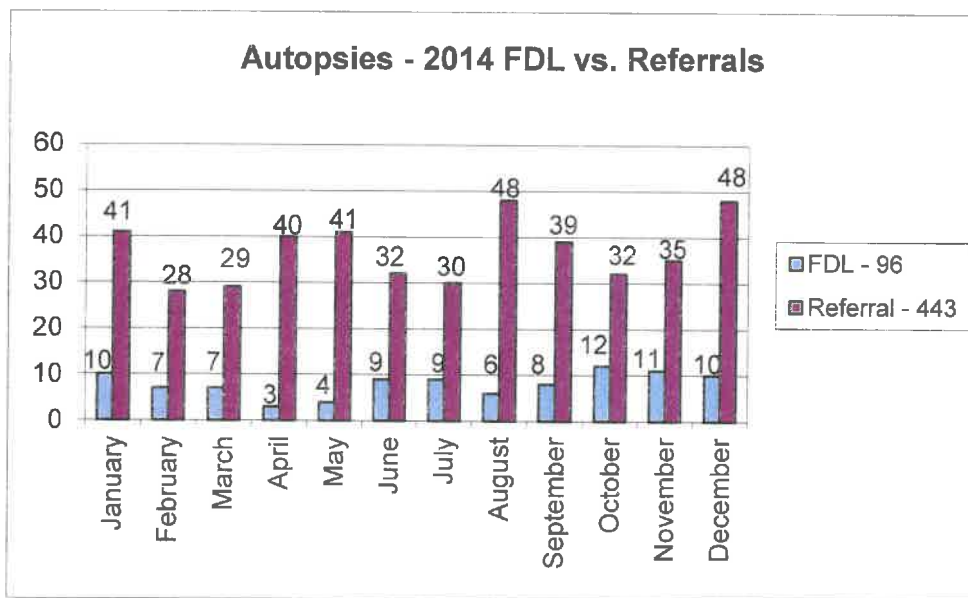


In 2014, 96 autopsies and 9 external examinations were performed on FDL County deaths. This means that autopsies were performed in 68% of the 142 cases in which jurisdiction was assumed. The number of autopsies performed on FDL County deaths in the past 11 years has ranged from 79 (in 2009) to 96 (in 2014), with an average of 87 autopsies performed per year.

In 2014, 443 referral autopsies were performed for other counties. Therefore, a total of 539 autopsies were performed in the FDL County autopsy suites in 2014.

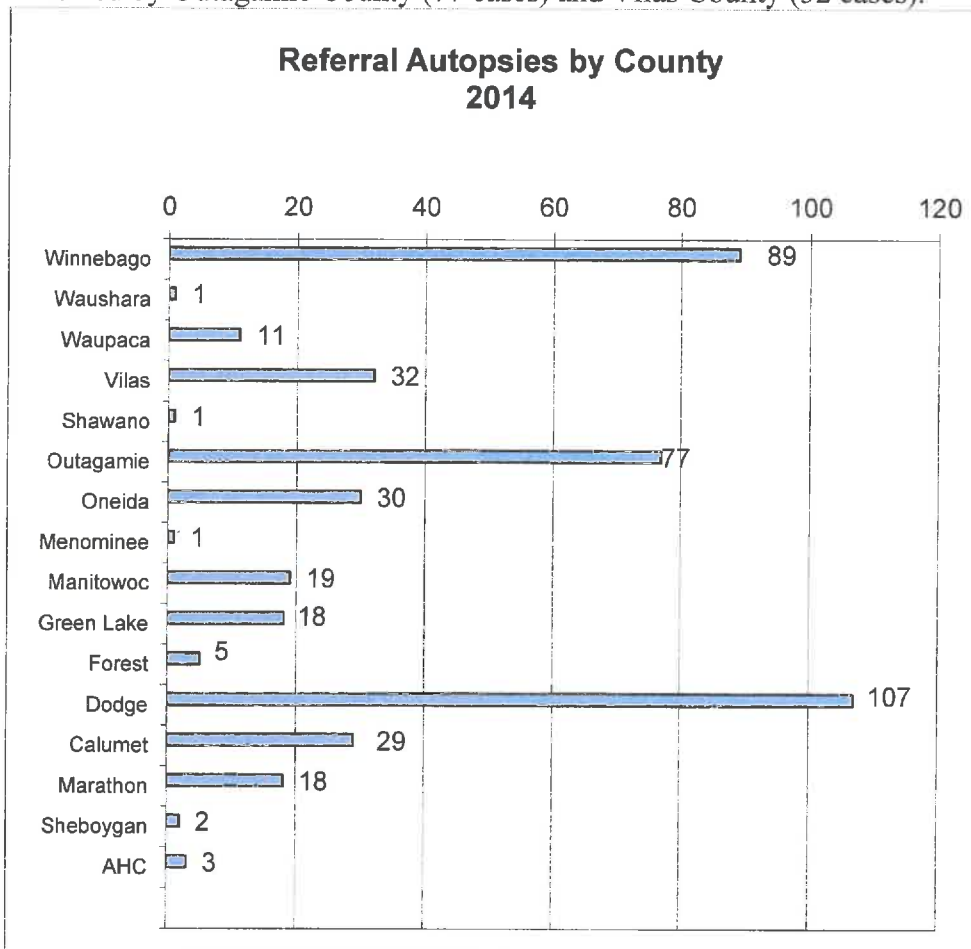


After a gradual decrease in referral autopsies from 2010-2012 (felt to be the direct result of the economic downturn and the fiscal pressure placed on other county Coroners and Medical Examiners to limit the number of autopsies performed), 2014 represents a continuing optimistic sign that some of these agencies are returning to a policy of performing autopsies as a vital component of death investigation. This is evidenced by a significant increase in FDL referral autopsies from 362 in 2013 to 443 in 2014. The number of referral autopsies performed in 2014 represents the highest number performed in office history.



In 2014, the number of FDL County autopsies performed monthly by the office ranged from 3 to 12, with an average of 8 FDL autopsies per month. The number of referral autopsies performed monthly ranged from 28 to 48, with a mean of 37 autopsies per month. The total monthly autopsy rate for the office was between 35 and 58 cases, with an average of 45 autopsies per month. The average monthly autopsy rate for 2013 was 37 cases per month.

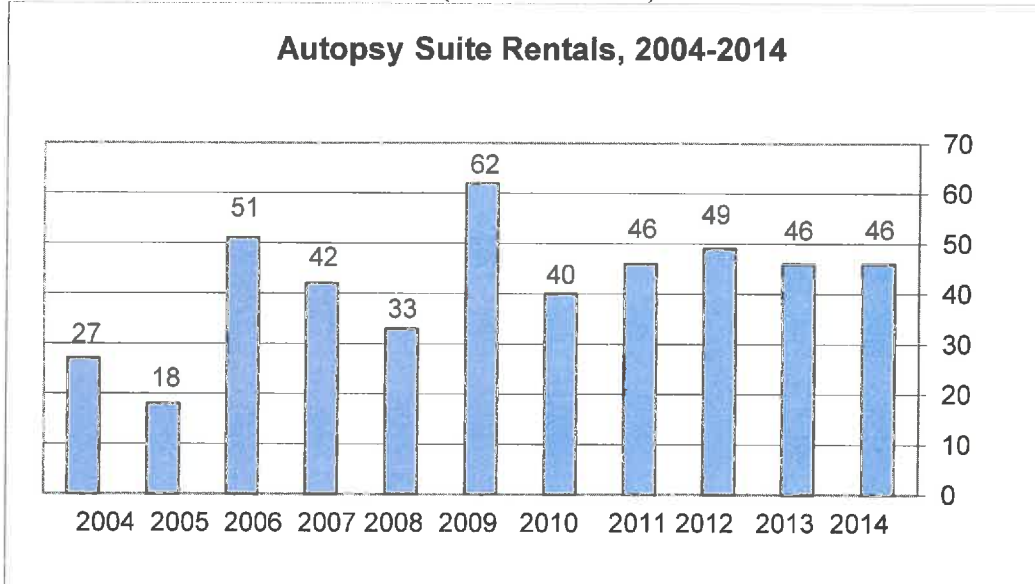
Referral autopsies were performed for 15 other counties in 2014, as well as three cases performed for Agnesian Health Care hospitals. Of the 15 counties, 12 routinely bring their cases to the FDL MEO for forensic autopsy, while the others use the office's services on occasion. There is no way to reliably predict the referral autopsy caseload in any given month or year, because of the variation in cases handled by the other counties and the individual philosophies of those Coroners and Medical Examiners in determining which cases to perform autopsies on. Dodge County (107 cases) and Winnebago County (89 cases) accounted for the most referral autopsies performed by the FDL MEO, followed by Outagamie County (77 cases) and Vilas County (32 cases).



Autopsy Room Rental

The MEO autopsy suites, when not in use, are available for tissue procurement by the three Wisconsin tissue procurement organizations on a fee for use basis. In 2014, tissue

procurement organizations utilized the FDL County MEO autopsy suites 46 times, the same number of times as in 2013 (see chart below).



Summary

The Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office continues to become busier with each passing year. In 2014, the FDL County Medical Examiner's Office carried out 497 death investigations on the 978 deaths occurring in Fond du Lac County, performing autopsies on 68% of the cases in which jurisdiction was assumed. This represents the most annual death investigations performed in the history of the office---a record that has been broken every year for the last 4 years. The number of cremation investigations performed in 2014 also represents the highest number performed by the office in its history (with the last 4 years representing the 4 highest annual cremation investigation numbers in its history). It appears that the mortality rate in FDL County has leveled off over the last 6 years, however.

The number of autopsies performed on FDL County deaths represents the 2nd highest number performed in recorded office history (second only to 2003, when 115 FDL County autopsies were performed by the Milwaukee County ME office). The FDL County Medical Examiner's Office performed 443 referral autopsies in 2014, representing the highest annual number performed in office history. Based on these numbers, the total number of 2014 autopsies performed at the FDL County MEO (539 cases) is the highest number ever performed by the office. The number of annual referral autopsies performed in the past 9 years (the period in which the office has existed as an independent ME Office) remains well above all previous years. In 2014, the FDL County Medical Examiner's Office autopsy referral service served 15 client counties and one health care system (Agnesian).

The autopsy suites were utilized for tissue procurement 46 times in 2014, the same number as in 2013. The annual number for autopsy suite usage by the tissue procurement organizations over the past 9 years remains higher than any year prior to that.

With regards to the types of cases being investigated, there was an increase in the number of accidental deaths in 2014, compared to 2013. The number of 2014 deaths due to motor vehicle crashes (involving automobiles and trucks) decreased only slightly from 2013 (from 9 to 8 deaths), while the number of motorcycle fatalities, increased from one to three. There was one fatality from a snowmobile crash, but no deaths related to crashes of ATVs, aircrafts or boats. There were no drowning deaths or fire deaths in 2014. The number of accidental deaths due to drug toxicity remained the same as 2013 (9 deaths), with two of the deaths involving heroin and four additional cases involving other opiates. There was one homicide in 2014.

The success of the FDL County Medical Examiner's Office is the result of a dedicated, knowledgeable, experienced staff of professionals, who are well-trained and well-equipped to carry out their responsibilities. In order to serve Fond du Lac County through superior death investigation work, the office must continue to maintain its superior team of professional, hard-working individuals, dedicated to the mission of the office, to the FDL MEO team and to Fond du Lac County. In order to carry out our mission, we will continue to do what is necessary to ensure that our standards of professionalism, our efficiency of operations and the quality of our work remain high. It is our assertion that the allegiance of our referral autopsy clientele is contingent on our reputation as a leading practitioner of forensic science.

Our goals for 2015 include the completion of our project to scan all paper files into a permanent digital database by the end of spring; to update the office mass fatality plan; to create a business continuity plan for the office; and to re-focus efforts on continuing education and training for our investigative staff.

With regards to the latter goal: it is my opinion that, to remain effective as a medicolegal death investigation office, and grow as an investigative team, we must continually educate ourselves, participate in training opportunities and learn from our professional experiences. Training always comes at a cost but, like any education, the benefits gained from the investment are invaluable. In an effort to reduce costs for training and education, the office will continue efforts to hold continuing education and training activities "in-house", while offering our staff the benefits of outside training opportunities to the extent the budget will allow.

It has become apparent that the workload of the office continues to grow, while the caseload continues to increase in complexity. This places increasing demands on the FDL MEO staff and our operation as a whole. As in the past, modifications in staffing, job responsibilities and office procedures will be implemented when and where necessary to address these challenges. Without dedicated staff members, such a strategy would not be conceivable though. The record number of referral autopsies performed by the FDL MEO staff in 2014 makes me optimistic that the fiscal pressures confronting our

associate counties are easing and that the philosophy applied to the investigation of death will not be governed by budget constraints in the future. What remains clear to me is that the relationships established between our office and our associates in other Coroner/ME Offices, is crucial to the success of all of our offices.

Whatever the challenges that face this office, the Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office staff can be depended upon to carry out their mission and fulfill their duty to the FDL community. We appreciate the continuing support of the FDL County Board and the FDL County Executive, without which we could not successfully carry out our mission to help make this community a safer, healthier place to live.

Respectfully Submitted,

P. Douglas Kelley, M.D.
Chief Medical Examiner
Fond du Lac County Medical Examiner's Office

**FDL County ME Office Records Broken in
2014**

- » Highest # of annual FDL death investigations performed
- » Highest # of annual cremation investigations performed
- » Highest # of annual total autopsies performed
- » Highest # of annual referral autopsies performed
- » 2nd Highest number of FDL County autopsies performed (highest # performed in 11 years)